



## **Right, Wrong, and along the Continuum... You**

Curriculum Unit 16.02.02  
by Cheryl Ann Canino

### **Introduction**

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Can I find myself in literature? Can I find and identify the me I am to become before I know my current self? How do I try on possible future selves when they don't exist around me? How do I search for a new self when my current self is in a major state of development? These questions plague my middle school students often, along with a myriad of other questions.

As a 7th/8th grade English language arts teacher, my presentation of the New Haven Reading curriculum's core reading book is sometimes an experience fraught with remonstrations of "How come we gotta read this? There's no black people in these books. Or this is stupid, Puerto Ricans would never do this. This would never happen in my neighborhood." My first impression upon hearing such remarks was that my students did not like or enjoy the various prescribed texts. Upon further inquiry, I learned that this was not necessarily true. Some students did like the prescribed text. However, what they most objected to was the lack of connection they felt between the text characters and themselves. In short, they wanted to see more of themselves in their text—they needed a greater connection.

However, what avenues of exploration of self for a "tween" or a new teen exist if he or she is not reading and does not have the ability to leave his current environment and "see how the others live?" And if I preface my present identity as "I am not a good reader," what is my incentive to self-direct an identity exploration within literature? It is hoped that through this unit's exploration of literature and subsequent discussions, students will commence thinking critically about themselves and their world. Through small and large group discussions, ideas will be elicited, expanded, re-configured and synergistically altered. Through this process of exploration, it is my hope that students will connect with literature, develop their respective individual voices, and seek additional reading experiences outside the classroom.

Within my 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts classes, I have found that there are students who are vigorously struggling with how they have defined themselves, and what rules school was requesting them to follow. Oftentimes, they are singled out or pointed to for exhibiting a lack of verbal filters, boisterous, and often inappropriate language (both content and context) and other less than desirable classroom behaviors. Once spotlighted, these students will then defensively lash out at whomever they deemed to have cast a negative aspersion. They justify their reactive response as standing their ground against being unjustly

treated for expressing their true self. For them a request to cease talking is a personal attack—a demand to stifle their voice or oppress their freedom of expression.

Teacher student conversations (usually question and answer periods where the students are interrogated for the “source of the problem”) reveal that students do not have the requisite language or life experience to adequately articulate inner struggles and are often acting out. Students experience inner struggles, family issues and peer problems that are not related to their academic reading challenges. However, elements within the educational environment (for instance, authority figure—teacher, bullies, diverse populations of students—black, Latina, females, males) serve as triggers. Students were simply enacting their own behavioral scripts.

This phenomenon is supported anecdotally when students acknowledge a perplexity with an awareness of grappling with a “something” or a “someone” (not in class) and being unable to cease the “automatic” response when faced with a conflict—internal or external. Others are astute enough to determine that certain things or situations cause them frustration and elicit negative behavior and admit either an inability or a lack of desire to restrain the resultant negative behavior. Consistently while “in the moment,” they are unable to adequately describe with their current language the discomfort and/or frustrations encountered prior to an acting out occurrence.

In *Right, Wrong, and Along the Continuum...You*, students have an opportunity to gain voice or language to converse about their internal and external conflict through discussions of primarily short stories. Students will be exposed to a diversity of voice through dramatic narratives challenging individual and group identity.

Conflicts revealed by the short stories compel students to think critically about identity development. Using reflective writing and small and large group discussions, students will develop voice, and appreciate the multi-dimensions of and perspectives contained with the concept of identity as they define and re-define for themselves its meaning.

## Objective

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Using a primarily “quasi-bibliotherapeutic” approach, this unit seeks to afford students an opportunity to discover and identify with characters, situations and/or literary elements within a narrative framework. By using narrative text, this writer seeks to assist students develop a positive self-concept, provide an opportunity to discover, examine and explore aspects of identity and critically deliberate issues and possible conflicts inherent in identity development. The clinical benefit of bibliotherapy was described initially in 1949 by C. Shrodes where it was described as paralleling the stages of psychotherapy, whereby the client-reader identifies with a work of literature, experiences a catharsis of emotion, and then achieves and integrates insight (Holman 1996). The term “quasi-bibliotherapeutic” is used to insinuate a connection with the reading of literature, generation of self-knowledge, and the crafting of an individual’s own identity narrative. It is not meant to imply that by reading the various texts contained herein a guide to self-discovery has been provided or such renderings will be therapeutic. This unit serves as an exploratory vehicle for the engagement of meaningful and thought provoking conversation with and between students. This unit should also provide fodder for student reflection on the concept of their identity as individuals and their placement within society.

## Academic Rationale

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*“The ultimate aim of literature is to be set free in the delirium...a possibility of life.”*<sup>1</sup> In the article, *Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming*, anthropologists Biehl and Locke relate their ethnographic projects of the urban poor in Brazil and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Deleuze’s reflections on the transformative potential of becoming (Biehl 2010). The anthropologists sought to extend Deleuze’s belief that literature reflects an author’s outlook on life to include patient writings. In their field studies, Biehl and Locke found that even in “delirium,” author patients strove to become something beyond past or current experiences.

Although my classroom is not an anthropological field assignment in a war ravaged urban poor setting of Bosnia-Herzegovina or possess the extreme poverty and social dislocation of Brazil, there is an undercurrent of similarity between the two. They both share a scrambling for limited resources. In the case of the anthropologic field studies, the search was for mental health treatment. Its unavailability led many to suffer from lack of proper diagnostics or inadequate services leading to great physical and mental sufferings. The unavailability caused many to make do with what was present and inadequate, and in the process of making do, they developed personae others judged as inappropriate.

I see the classroom as a place where students come to explore and grow based on text examinations and shared discussions, and not just the site of Lexile measurements. The classroom should be a place where students develop enduring understandings of the world they have inherited and for which they are an integral part. However, I recognize that this is sometimes not the case.

In addition to improving their academic skills, my students are searching for identity. They are looking for black, brown, and yellow characters who share their current experiences. They are confronted with a curriculum they perceive as not connecting to them and offers little about themselves. We continually ask them to “see” the enduring understandings of identity from the respective core texts and then we as educators make judgments about their faulty understandings. When they try to make do with the limited texts, they often misinterpret and define identity in an “us versus them” modality that translates into a hierarchy of value in which they never see their own individual or group identity richness. Within this hierarchy of value, they create a misconception that their identities are not valued.

Using short stories primarily by authors of color about characters of color, the teacher of this unit has an opportunity to present different points of view that are aimed to resonant with students’ perspective of identity. Students are to critically examine literature for identity foundations and departures within short story texts. Literature can be used according to poet, Dwayne Betts as “... the site that allows us to have conversations we don't usually have.”<sup>2</sup> Not only are students able to use literature as an experiential guide of character identity conflict within literature but an opportunity to “try on the shoes (identities) of others” and vicariously experience their struggles. Students explore the relationship between the individual and the group identity issues, examine and evaluate methodologies employed by characters for their resolution, and assess the impact or the potential impact on identity.

The narrative—how we tell our story is “...the language of experience, whether it is ours, someone else’s or that of fictional characters...” (Cron 2012) It is how we transmit important information from one individual or community to the next. Effective stories capture, hold our attention, and transport us into the world of a character. (Zak 2013) It is through the reading of the short stories and the subsequent discussions that students acquire language of identity. By discussing the effects of events on the identity of fictional

characters, students gather greater insight into their own lives. Students are challenged to examine the basis of their own identity formation.

## Curricular Plan

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The curriculum should serve as a vehicle for critical discourse about identity. This year long supplemental or enrichment curriculum creates a series of common literary experiences that complement identity concepts raised in the core texts of the New Haven’s 7/8 ELA curriculum, by adding alternative perspectives of individual and societal concepts of identity. The curriculum commences with text that presents a broad definition of identity. With a broad definition of identity, the curriculum then asks the student to refine, reshape, and re-configure this identity definition with each literary experience. The curriculum aims to steer students away from a static concept of identity to one which embraces constant adjustments to an original conceptualization. For some students, it may be a first encounter with a dynamic concept where their definitions may seemingly be right and wrong at the same time. The curriculum plan is designed to have students grapple and resolve their conceptualizations about identity in reflective journal writing and group discussions.

## Context

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I teach English Language Arts at the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade level at Bishop Woods Executive Academy (BWEA) in New Haven, Connecticut. BWEA, a Title I school, serves students from grades PK through and including grade 8. For the 2014-2015 school year, the total school population was reported as totaling 505 students, of which 324 were eligible for free lunch and an additional 23 were eligible for reduced lunch. .<sup>3</sup> The racial ethnic breakdown for the total student population was reported as: 40% Black, 43% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 13% White. 99 students (47 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 52 8<sup>th</sup> grade students) were reported at this level and were distributed into four classes.

## Basic Structure of Class Time

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At Bishop Woods Executive Academy, the weekly student instruction schedule is two 90 and one 45 minutes block of instruction. A natural fit for this curriculum within the existing ELA class structure for a whole class implementation would be the one 45-minute weekly learning block. Placement within the independent reading section of the existing curriculum affords students a greater range of individual choice by piquing interest and generating exploration of issues and concerns that greater awareness results in. It also provides an appearance of something extra—aside from the “regular” curriculum and perhaps something less formal. A chance for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to talk about stories and characters, and identity. This “liberating” appearance is a further attempt to create an environment for experiential learning and greater exploration of

concepts, rather than a search for the “right” answer.

The structure of the current Readers and Writers Workshop implemented at Bishop Woods Executive Academy consists of the following:

- Objective: This is a statement of what the student will be able to achieve as a result of the particular lesson.
- Do Now: Generally, a precursor to the lesson. Often used to direct the student’s attention to where a lesson may begin or a review of past related lessons.
- Direct Instruction: (I Do.) A 10-15 minute presentation of the instruction of the subject matter by the teacher. Students are expected to follow, using listening and note taking skills.
- Guided Practice: (We Do.) Teacher models for the student the lesson being taught and then the student attempts to apply the lesson taught.
- Independent Practice: (You Do.) Teacher releases the student to work independently to apply the skills taught in the lesson.
- Closure/Exit Slip : Reflection about the day’s lesson and perhaps respond to a question.

Additionally, as part of this Readers and Writers Workshop format, the New Haven curriculum divides the school year into quarters where the first and last quarter cover fiction and the middle quarters focus on nonfiction. Each quarter requires that a student read a New Haven curriculum determined Core book, and complete a major writing assignment and two performance tasks.

## Strategies

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This curriculum may be used as a year-long supplement, enrichment or stand-alone curriculum exploration of identity. The essential identity questions and enduring understandings lend themselves to identity concepts often found in young adult text and English language arts curriculum. This unit may be used concurrently with both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and tied to a culminating year end event in which all 7/8 grade English Language Arts students are expected to be a contributing member in a “starring” role, showcasing some aspect of their identity exploration. The goal of the culminating experience is inclusion of all students portraying their best presentation or statement about identity, whatever type of culminating experience is chosen by the teacher and students, it should provide an opportunity for students to present their best self.

Having tangential relations to the respective core books of the New Haven Curriculum is important for two reasons. First, it allows students to do a side by side comparison of texts—the short stories and the core book. Highlighting texts in this manner makes connections for those who may have initially deemed the core books irrelevant to their world. Or for those who connected with the core book, it presents a chance to deepen their understanding of an aspect of identity due to a more kindred experience with the respective short story’s character’s characteristics, concerns, history, or challenges. The curriculum provides students with an opportunity to discover the universality of identity and its development. The student realizes that though the respective character traverses along different paths, they all contribute to their own identity’s development. Hence, the student is awarded the treasure of an enduring understanding of an aspect of identity by discovering thematic similarities between the differing texts.

A second important aspect of using this approach is the brevity of the short story text. For a subset of students who are chronically absent from class, the brevity of the text allows for an in school manipulation of text focused around concepts presented in the core text. Student absence whether due to behavioral, familial, or counseling sessions is often unsettling and sometimes causes students to either individually disengage or disrupt an engaged class experience. Whatever the reason, the short text allows the previously absent student to “jump into” identity discussions from concepts gleaned from the short story text to a whole class discussion after a relatively short catch up time period.

Many of the short stories intentionally include controversial events or are high arcs stories. This was a conscious choice. Students in this age group love drama and providing character drama ensures dialogue and discussion about the stories, if the students believe that their voice or responses to the text will be valued. Students are able to address implications of events as they relate to characters more freely than if they were discussing their own concept of identity.

Much of the focus for this unit is on whole class and small heterogeneous group discussion. Intrinsic in this strategy is the assumption that students know how to have such discussions. If it has not been previously established in the teacher’s classroom, it is incumbent on the teacher to provide students with the requisite skills necessary to achieve and maintain a safe and supportive classroom environment. Students need to know how to “respectfully disagree” with one another, present alternative viewpoints, and collaborate. Specific strategies may include: developing norms for conversations as an introduction to the Socratic seminar, using fishbowls—small groups modeling the desired, as well as the undesired discussion behaviors, collaborative conversations—where students work together to develop and present a response to a discussion prompt to a smaller group, or providing scaffolding, such as: argument frames, i.e., “My partner believes that \_\_\_\_\_. However, I disagree with that opinion/statement because \_\_\_\_\_,” when students are paired based on their respective different viewpoints.

One way to increase student exposure to literature of identity would be to house both print and audio books of short stories in the In-School Suspension office (ISS). Having both print and audio present in the ISS office allows students continued access to the ideas and concepts explored in class as well additional resources that would be available in collections of short stories.

The fact that ISS is not staffed by a certified teacher is not a detriment to student exposure to literature about identity. Generally, the adults accessible to students during the school day are great resources for students (and teachers) because these student sounding boards proffer perspectives not considered by the student. Reading or listening to the audio short stories during time spent in ISS may allow students to focus on the behaviors of fictional characters and generate conversations with the adult sounding boards. Many times such adults provide students with “knowledge” that some of the concepts are not just concepts or stories from a book but real life experiences for the individual or people of their respective lives.

Student self-reflection is used within the curriculum as a means for self-assessment. Students will be expected to maintain a reading response/writing notebook. Expressions within the reading/literacy notebooks should reflect the student’s different learning styles as well as offering a place to share and respond to readings, teacher selected prompts, reflections on the concept of identity, Cornell notes, “lifted line” responses, brainstorming, creative writing, drawing, charts, vocabulary, K-W-L charts, and interviews. <sup>4</sup> While the teacher wants this to be a safe place to record and play with thinking, it must be acknowledged that the teacher is a mandated reporter and it is the intent to have the contents shared with the author, author’s peers and the teacher. Hence, it is important that if student has any concerns that the teacher may report any

notebook contents, the student should indicate that any “controversial subjects/reporting” should be labeled as fictional accounts. Additionally, if a student wishes to restrict access to contents of their respective notebooks from peers, the student may do so by highlighting in the right hand corner of the affected page(s) “Do Not Share.”

## Classroom Activities

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The curriculum unit is designed to use literary works, film excerpts, videos, and contemporary songs thematically focused around the essential question of what is identity. Using reading and writing strategies students actively engage in reading by annotating text to converse with the text’s author, record impressions, and decipher story elements. Student annotations may also be shared with other students to raise additional questions for the reader of the text.

Students invest in the text by using their annotations as fodder to build greater understanding of the concept of identity and a launching pad for group discussions. Underlying this framework should be the development of a safe classroom environment for student conversations to take place, in order to generate more critical analysis of the concept of identity.

Students are asked to generate enduring understandings about the importance of the concept of identity. They are asked to consider it as a dynamic concept, and determine choices surrounding the concept. Students are asked to evaluate individual identity and group identity for possible conflict to determine the effect on choice, membership and value.

### Lesson 1: Who Are You?

This activity is a beginning activity where students are asked to look at the how characters describe themselves to determine what they claim as part of their personal or individual identity.

Students will learn how to annotate text by highlighting key information, taking marginal notes, listing key information, writing a brief summary of the text, and listing vocabulary words in their reading/writing notebooks.

Beginning the lesson by listening to a contemporary song, such as, “ *Me, Myself and I*,” where a rapper “spits lyrics” claiming all he needs is his passion—writing and rapping, the student’s attention is directed to an example of a statement of one’s identity (*Rexba n.d.*). The students are asked who are they by asking them to name a passion-something they love to do.

During the directed instruction, guided and independent practices, the student’s attention is further directed to text whose thematic focus is the formation of one’s identity. In the poems, *The Path* by Paul Laurence Dunbar (where the poet suggests that one must be prepared for hard work because one’s path is self-generated and not easy), *I Am What I Am* by Rosario Morales (where the poet shares that she is all of her parts—her ethnicity, her connections to her current physical space, and her experiences), and *Philosophical Truths* by Luis Torres (where he suggests that life’s journey is fleeting, and by the time we realize what makes us “eternal” life is over), students are introduced to language about the concept of identity (Dunbar 2001) (Morales 2011) (Torres 2011).

At this point, they are asked to define identity. Students are then paired, asked to review partner's annotations, identity definition, and leave partner with a question or response to what the partner has written. Upon retrieving their notebooks, students discuss with partners their initial definition of identity in response to their partner's writings. After this pair-share discussion, students are asked to revise their definitions to address the responses made/question(s) raised by their partner concerning their definition of identity. The lesson concludes by asking the student for a definition of themselves within the school setting.

An assessment of text annotation provides feedback to both teacher and student into student text analysis. Students are expected to modify, elaborate, and revise their definition of identity after each thematically grouped text reading. Both students and teachers are able to track the incorporation or rejection of ideas that deviate from their previous conceptualization of identity. Teachers may use student reflections to guide their class focus. It may also signal to teachers what areas may need greater clarification in an effort to aid student understanding of the text. Annotations allow a visual mapping of the text, especially when students have an opportunity to view the annotations of others.

An extended activity for this lesson may include having the students read the picture book, *I Want To Be* by Thylia Moss and read/listen to the audiobook *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat* by Nikki Giovanni (Moss 1993) (Giovanni 2008). After reading, students would create a rhythmic poem or a picture book that emulates the style of Nikki Giovanni or Thylia Moss celebrating some aspect of the student's history, present and where they see themselves in the next 5-6 years. (This time was selected based on their next phase—entrance into high school.)

## **Lesson 2: What is Home?**

This activity designed as a beginning activity directing students to the short story structure. Students will be introduced to or review six literary elements within a short story: plot (what happens in the story), setting (where or when the story takes place), character (the people or animals taking part in the story), conflict (the struggle within the story), point of view (angle from which the story is told), and theme (the central idea of the story) within a short story. The objective of the lesson is to ensure that students are able to determine a short story's elements. It also serves as a gauge for text understanding and starting point for class discussions.

Watching the Flocabulary@ rap video on literary elements of a story, *These Are the Five Things* provides students with a succinct working definition of a short story's elements (Flocabulary n.d.). The video provides working definitions for all the listed elements of this lesson plan except point of view. However, a working definition for this missing element, as well as any other literary devices may easily be augmented by the teacher.

The thematically grouped texts ask students to discuss how place influences the concept of identity. During the directed instruction, guided and independent practices, students are first asked to focus on the story element of setting. They are then asked to determine whether home is a geographic location or a place of experience of the past or present.

In the short stories, *God Bless America*, by John O. Killens (where the Negro husband is preparing to leave his pregnant wife who questions why he is in such a hurry to fight for a country that treats him as less than a full citizen), *The Night We Became People Again* by Jose Luis Gonzalez (where a father leaves work early upon hearing that his pregnant wife is to deliver her baby and experiences a city blackout), and *El Hoyo* by Mario Suarez (where a former barbershop patron reminisces about his barbershop experience and the barbershop owner), home is presented as not only a physical place but as a place of experience both present and past



(Killens 1966) (M. T. Suarez 2011) (**Gonzalez 2011**) . While students are not expected to define home in a particular way, their definitions of home should be reflective of their experiences with the literary texts.

Working in pairs for this activity, students are expected to record the elements of the short stories and their respective definitions of home. Students will then be divided into small groups of no more than three pairs to share and discuss their definitions of home. If students are not familiar with small group discussions, this would be an optimal time to demonstrate the Socratic method of discussion starting with a fishbowl demonstration.

As a closure exercise, students would watch Lecrae’s music video, *Welcome to America* (Lecrae 2015). In their reading/writing notebooks, students are to revise and expand their definition of identity to include the concept of home.

An extended activity for this lesson would include reading Franz Kafka’s short, short story, *Fellowship* and write a short short story depicting what happened when one of the five “friends” tells the 6<sup>th</sup> fellow why he should not be included as one of them (Kafka, *Fellowship* 1983). The student should incorporate one of the definitions of home within the story.

### **Lesson 3: Who’s Your Daddy?**

The thematically grouped texts of this lesson ask students to discuss what role family plays in shaping identity. Students will examine what influence family has on the concept of identity. During the directed instruction, guided and independent practices, students are asked to look at the role of father and respond to the parental images as depicted by the characters in the respective texts.

Students are given the two following memoir excerpts depicting an image of a father and asked to compare and contrast the two images in at least three to five complete sentences.

*“... The truth of us was always that you were our ring. We’d summoned you out of ourselves, and you were not given a vote. If only for that reason, you deserved all the protection we could muster. Everything else was subordinate to this fact. If that sounds like a weight, it shouldn’t. The truth is that I owe you everything I have. Before you, I had my questions but nothing beyond my own skin in the game, and that was really nothing at all because I was a young man, and not clear of my own human vulnerabilities. But I was grounded and domesticated by the plain fact that should I now go down, I would not go down alone (Coates 2015, 66) .”*

*“Two days later Dad returns from his cigarette hunt. It’s the middle of the night but he gets Malachy and me out of the bed. He has the smell of the drink on him. He has us stand at attention in the kitchen. We are soldiers. He tells us we must promise to die for Ireland. We will, Dad, we will. Altogether we sing Kevin Barry (McCourt 1996, 39) .”*

Students are then asked to complete a character analysis of the father figures found in the short stories, *Daughter* by Erskine Caldwell (where a mule dies while in the care of a Negro sharecropper, whose money and crops were confiscated as payment for the dead mule and is subsequently unable to feed his daughter), *Smile* by Emile Raboteau (where a son steals money from his father and the wrong son is disciplined and subsequently killed, and *Letter to My Daughter* by Sharon Flake (where an absentee father writes a letter to his teenage daughter offering the only thing he has—knowledge) (Caldwell 1961) (Raboteau 2006) (Flake, *The*

Ugly One 2004).

As an exit slip, students are asked to define the role of a father. An extended activity would have students use their definition of a father and create the criterion for a character award for Best Dad to be given to one of the imperfect dads from depicted in the short stories: *Daughter*, *Smile*, or *Letter to My Daughter*. Students would be required to justify the dad of their choice and design a Best Dad Award Certificate to commemorate the occasion for the winning dad.

#### **Lesson 4: What Is Your Relationship?**

This lesson looks at how partners are chosen in relationships. Students are asked to look at how value is ascribed to potential partners and how characters assessed themselves in relationships. Students are asked to search for the main idea or themes of the text concerning of how to pick potential mates or how the characters assessed themselves in response to choosing potential mates.

Have students listen to an audio clip of Beyoncé's *Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)* and then state the message of this song in at least two to three complete sentences (*BeyonceVEVO 2009*). Students would then proceed to analyze two short stories, *Two Offers* by Frances E.W. Harper (where a woman and her female cousin discuss the woman's two marriage proposals, and the cousin's reflection of the choices each made), *So I Ain't No Good Girl* (where a female teen in an abusive relationship thinks she is not worthy of anything better), and two poems, *To Be Continued* by Kate Rushin (where a woman reflects on a conversation had with a girlfriend about starting her life over after a failed relationship) and *People Love Their Freaks*, by Terry Galloway (where a young man goes back to look for a girl he loved at a summer camp for the disabled only to realize he never knew her name) (Harper 1997) (Flake, *So I Ain't No Good Girl* 2004) (Rushin 2015) (Galloway 1997). The exit slip for his activity is to have the students describe an ideal girlfriend citing why the selected characteristics are more important than those not chosen.

For an extended activity, the students are to read, analyze the selected stories: *Jacob's Rules* and *Wanted a Thug* and then write a short story that includes at least one character from either of the using the following RAFT (Flake, *Jacob's Rules* 2004) (Flake, *Wanted A Thug* 2004). Ensure that the student's depiction is consistent with the short stories' presentation of the respective character.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Writer as a "good guy" who wants to be chosen by a "desired" girl	Thug	Short story with a message related to that found in Sherley Anne Williams's poem, <i>Some One Sweet Angel Chile (S. I. her Williams 1988)</i> <sup>5</sup>	You are not good for
"Desired" girl who does not want to be like her mother	Desired girl's mother	Short story that includes a message related to that found in Kate Rushin's poem, <i>To Be Continued</i>	Should the desired girl make her mother's choice when she chose desired girl's father

#### **Lesson 5: What Do They Say About You?**

This lesson asks students to look at patterns of behavior that identify characters as individuals or as members in a group. Students are asked to examine how point of view impacts the way a story is told.

Students begin by reading the following modified (by this writer) excerpt from Kevin Henkes', picture book, *Chrysanthemum* and then account for the changes experienced by Chrysanthemum (Henkes 1991).

*"... The day she was born was the happiest day in her parent's lives.*

*"She's perfect,' said her mother.*

*"Absolutely," said her father.*

*And she was...Chrysanthemum thought her name was absolutely perfect...And then she started school...*

*But when Mrs. Chud took roll call, everyone giggled upon hearing Chrysanthemum's name.*

*"It's so long," said Jo.*

*"It's scarcely fits on her name tag," said Rita pointing.*

*"I'm named after my grandmother," said Victoria.*

*"You're named after a flower!"*

*Chrysanthemum wilted...She did not think her name was absolutely perfect...She thought it was dreadful...That morning the students were introduced to Mrs. Twinkle, the music teacher... Her voice was like something out of a dream, as was everything else about her...The students were speechless...They thought Mrs. Twinkle was an indescribable wonder...They went out of their way to make a nice impression...*

*"What's so humorous?" asked Mrs. Twinkle.*

*Chrysanthemum! was the answer.*

*"Her name is so long," said Jo.*

*"It scarcely fits on her name tag," said Rita, pointing.*

*"I'm named after my grandmother," said Victoria.*

*"She's named after a flower!"*

*"My name is long." Mrs. Twinkle.*

*"It is?" said Jo.*

*"My name would scarcely fit on a name tag," said Mrs. Twinkle.*

*"It would?" said Rita, pointing.*

*"And—"said Mrs. Twinkle, "I'm named after a flower, too!"*

*"You are?" said Victoria.*

*"Yes," said Mrs. Twinkle. "My name is Delphinium. Delphinium Twinkle. And if my baby is a girl, I'm considering Chrysanthemum as a name. I think it's absolutely perfect."*

*Chrysanthemum could scarcely believe her ears...Chrysanthemum did not think her name was absolutely*

*perfect...She knew it!"*

Students then read and discuss the point of view found in the short stories: *Being Crazy* by W.E.B. DuBois (where a Negro man encounters racism as he attempts to exercise his right to public accommodations), *The Lottery Ticket* by Ventura Garcia Calderon (where patrons at a theater event await the discovery of the winner of a lottery where the prize is a date with an exotic dancer, only to discover that the Negro winner denounces the prize), and *Puertoricanness* (where a woman who had stifled her Puerto Rican heritage welcomes its reawakening) (DuBois 1966) (Garcia-Calderon 1961) (Levins Morales 2011). Students close the lesson by answering the following question, "Other than in a mirror, can you see yourself without others?"

An extended activity for this lesson would be to attend a cultural art exhibit and have students critique the exhibit focusing on the sensory details of their impressions, i.e., Do the colors arouse any emotions within you? Do the objects trigger a smell or tactile sensation? If a visit to an art gallery is not possible, the students could attend an online art gallery, i.e., Modern Museum of Art (MoMA). MoMA has an exhibit featuring the following pieces which could serve as an inspiration: *Wigs* by Lorna Simpson (1994), *Star Doll* by Moriko Mori (1998), *Untitled* ( from *Runaways* series ) by Glenn Ligon (1993), *Nile Born* by Ana Mendieta (1984), *Jewish Jackie* by Deborah Kass (1992), *Untitled* by Robert Gober (1996), and *Blonde/Red Dress/Kitchen* by Laurie Simmons (1978) (MoMALearning n.d.).

Another extended activity could have the students create a short story or poem that describes a family member or an adult they admire that adopts the style of Franz Kafka's short story, *The Wish To Be A Red Indian* or Jacqueline Woodson's poem, *Describe Somebody* (Kafka 1983) (Woodson 2003).

An accommodation activity for this lesson may include reading Franz Kafka's short story, *The Wish To Be A Red Indian* and Jacqueline Woodson's poem, *Describe Somebody* and then have the students 1) circle all verbs, 2) box all adjectives, 3) triangulate all nouns and 4) underline all adverbs. After discussing the role of verbs, adjectives, nouns and adverbs, students would re-read the short story and poem and analyze how the selected words affect the meaning of the poem and short story. Students could proceed on to create a faux Facebook® page for a friend who is going to a new school that 1) has a visual with a nickname and shows them doing what they love, 2) using family, friends, acquaintances, interests, and visitors to his/her Facebook®, describe your friend, 3) post comments people visiting his page would make because they know him/her or share interests or likes/dislikes (include at least two negative characteristics about your friend with a positive spin) <sup>6</sup>.

## **Lesson 6: Who Said You Were Beautiful?**

This lesson examines the concept of identity as it relates to a female's standard of beauty. The female characters the students encounter in the literary texts are described by themselves or others as different. Students are asked to consider whether the various texts present their differences as a source of character conflict and if so, to what extent is the impact.

Students are first asked to compare and contrast the main character featured in excerpts from two novels: *The House on Mango Street* and *The Bluest Eye* (Cisneros 1984) (Morrison 1978).

*"Everybody in our family has different hair. My Papa's hair is like a broom, all up in the air. And me, my hair is lazy. It never obeys barrettes or bands. Carlos' hair is thick and straight. He doesn't need to comb it. Nenny's hair is slipper— slides out of your hand. And Kiki, who is the*

*youngest, has hair like fur. But my mother's hair, my mother's hair, like little rosettes, like little candy circles all curly and pretty because she pinned it in pincurls all day, sweet to put your nose into when she is holding you, holding you and you feel safe, is the warm smell of bread before you bake it, is the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed still warm with her skin, and you sleep near her, the rain outside falling and Papa snoring. The snoring, the rain, and Mama's hair that smells like bread (Cisneros 1984) ."*

*"As long as she looked the way she did, as long she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers, and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always. But what about Marie Appolonaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino. Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her and called on her only when everyone was required to respond. She also knew that when one of the girls wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy or wanted to get an immediate response from h she could say "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! And never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot and mock anger from the accused. It occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if her eyes... those eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful...Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola..."*

*"What can I do for you, my child?"*

*She stood there, her hands folded across her stomach, a little protruding pot of tummy. "Maybe. Maybe you can do it for me."*

*"Do what for you?"*

*"I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me."*

*"Help you how?" Tell me. Don't be frightened."*

*"My eyes."*

*"What about your eyes?"*

*"I want them blue."*

*Soaphead pursed his lips, and let his tongue stroke a gold inlay. He thought it was at one the most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received. Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him—money, love, revenge—this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness*

*and see the world with blue eyes... His outrage grew and felt like power—only the power to make others believe he had it. It seemed so sad so frivolous, ha mere mortality, not judgment, kept him from it. Or did it?" (Morrison 1978)*

In *The House On Mango Street*, Cisneros describes her family members by their individual hair textures, whereas, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison introduces students to the female character, Pecola, who believes that if she obtains blue eyes she will be deemed beautiful by others and her life will change. In a poem, *Compliments*, the poet asks the reader whether or not one has received a compliment if the compliment denies who or what they are (Tafolla 2011). Finally, in the short story, *The Ugly One*, author Sharon Flake's character, teenage girl, Asia is described as having been beautiful by her grandmother until age seven at which point she developed a skin disorder and is told to look inward for her beauty (Flake, *The Ugly One* 2004).

For an extended activity the students would compare and contrast three works, *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron, *Nappy* by Charisse Carney-Nunes, and *I Am Not My Hair* by Indie Arie for their respective themes in a 500-word essay. <sup>7 8 9</sup> Explain how the rhythm of the respective pieces add or detract from the message of the respective pieces. Cite text evidence to support the claims made in your analysis. Your essay should have a clear thesis, and include an analysis of the point of view.

## Appendix A

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This curriculum seeks to build 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade student literary skills by implementing Connecticut Core Standards in English Language Arts (PCGEDucation 2013). To simplify presentation of the standards and deviations, this writer listed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade standards followed by parenthetical 8<sup>th</sup> grade standards—fully listing the standard if different or partially listing only the additional element(s) or points of departure if very similar.

With a greater emphasis on standards of speaking and listening, the curriculum includes standards of reading, and writing. Through discussions and self-reflective writings, students will self-assess enduring understandings of the concept of identity, as they gauge, revise, refine, and demonstrate their comprehension and analysis of the text.

Specifically, this curriculum highlights the following standards:

Reading:

1. 7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text. (RL.8.2 ... including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot...)
1. 7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama. (RL.8.4 Determine ... connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or

allusions to other texts.)

Writing:

1. 7.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (W.8.9 same as W.7.9)
2. 7.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. (W.8.10 same as W.7.10)

Speaking and Listening:

1. 7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (SL.8.1 same as SL.7.1)
2. 7.1.B Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals, and deadlines, and define individual roles, as needed. (SL.8.1.B same as SL.7.1.B)
3. 7.1.C Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed. (SL.8.1.C Pose questions...comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.)
4. 7.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, modify their own views. (SL.8.1.D Acknowledge...when warranted, qualify, or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.)

## Appendix B

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### Student Resources

Short Stories/Poems

*Compliments* , Tafolla, Carmen

*Daughter* , Caldwell, Erskine

*Describe Somebody*, Woodson, Jacqueline

*El Hoyo* , Suarez, Mario

*Fellowship*, Kafka, Franz

*God Bless America* , Killens, John O.

*On Being Crazy*, DuBois, W. E .B. ,

*People Love Their Freaks* , Galloway, Terry

*Philosophical Truths* , Torres, Luis A.

*Puertoricanness* , Levins Morales, Aurora

*Smile* , Raboteau, Emily

*So I Ain't No Good Girl*, Flake, Sharon G.

*Sweet Angel Chile* , Williams, Sherley as cited in *Invented Lives*

*The Path*, Dunbar, Paul Laurence

*The Two Offers* , Harper, Frances

*The Ugly One*, Flake, Sharon G.

*The Wish To Be A Red Indian*, Kafka, Franz

*To Be Continued* , Rushin, Kate

*Wanted A Thug* , Flake, Sharon G.

## **Picture Books**

Carney-Nunes, Charisse. 2006. *Nappy*. Washington, DC. Nunes Productions, LLC.

Henkes, Kevin. 1991. *Chrysanthemum*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Herron, Carolivia. *Nappy Hair*.

Moss, Thylas. 1993. *I Want To Be*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

## **Novels**

Cisneros, Sandra. 1984. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books.

Morrison, Toni. 1978. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Vintage International.

## **Poetry Collections**

Giovanni, Nikki. 2008. *Hip Hop Speaks To Children*. Naperville: Sourcebooks.

## **Teacher Resources**

Films:

*Lucky*, is a 100-minute film featuring Lucky, a 10-year-old South African orphan who leaves his Zulu village after the death of his mother to make his own life in the city only to find no one will help him, except an Indian woman called Padma who initially treats him like a stray animal (Dlamini 2011). There are some great 3-10



minute short scenes depicting how Lucky defines himself and how other adult males define manhood. Such scenes could graphically be used to illustrate aspects of identity.

*B for Boy*, a contemporary drama set in Nigeria, about one woman's desperate need for a male child. It explores the discrimination of women in the names of culture and religion. (Uche Nwadike 2013) There are some great 3-10 minute short scenes depicting the relationship of women, gender inequity, issues of lineage as it relates to the value of a male child.

### Music Videos:

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Herron, Carolivia. n.d. "AdmireComedyLecture." youtube. Accessed June 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKKVHFg1pds>.

## **Online Gallery**

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## **Picture Books**

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Henkes, Kevin. 1991. Chrysanthemum. New York: Greenwillow Books.

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Moss, Thylas. 1993. I Want To Be. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

## **Novels**

Cisneros, Sandra. 1984. The House on Mango Street. New York: Vintage Books.

Morrison, Toni. 1978. The Bluest Eye. New York: Vintage International.

## **Autobiographies/Memoirs**

Angelou, Maya. 1969. I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings. New York: Ballantine Books.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. Between The World and Me. New York: Spiegel & Prau, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC.

McCourt, Frank. 1996. Angela's Ashes. New York: Touchstone.

## **Anthologies:**

75 Short Masterpieces, Stories From The Worlds Literature edited Roger B. Goodman.  
1961 New York: Bantum Books.

American Negro Short Stories, edited John Henrik Clarke. 1966. New York: Hill & Wang.

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My Soul Has Grown Deep, Classics of Early African American Literature, editor John Edgar Wideman. 2001. Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers.

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Staring Back, The Disability Experience From The Inside Out, edited Kenny Fries. 1997. New York: Penguin Group.

The Best American Mystery Stories 2006, edited Scott Turow. 2006. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The Complete Stories of Franz Kafka, edited Nahum N. Glatzer. 1983. New York: Schocken Books Inc.

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3. National Center for Education Statistics, CCD Public school data 2013-2014, 2014-2015 school years.
4. *Reading/Literacy Notebook* , New Haven Public Schools Grades 6-8 LA Curriculum Revision 2013
5. I see the mask, sense the girl and the woman you became, wonder if mask and woman are one, if pain is the sum of all your knowing victim theonly game you learned. Sherley Anne Williams, *Some One Sweet Angel Chile*, as cited in *Invented Lives* , ed. Mary Helen Washington

6. Faux Facebook templates may be located on Freeology at <http://freeology.com/graphicorgs/faux-facebook-profile-worksheet/>
7. Carolivia Herron's reading of her "banned" picture book, *Nappy Hair*. (Listen to the first 8:13 minutes of YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMiGU0D3kYs> to hear the call and response rhythm featured in this book. To get background information concerning the controversy about *Nappy Hair*, view the YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKKVHFg1pds> (Herron n.d.).
8. Charisse Carney-Nunes' reading of her poem/picture book, *Nappy*. (4:50 minutes into <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYWWnbHCxgw>(Radio 2010))
9. Recording and lyrics to Indie Arie's, *I Am Not My Hair*(ArieVEVo 2009)

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